

SAINT CATHERINE OF SIENA

better but cling to the worse." Giovanni Boccaccio was thirty-four years old, and not yet the author of the *Decameron*. He had written his early prose romance and poems, had deserted or been deserted by his Fiammetta, and was now either at Florence or (as seems more likely) in Romagna at Forli, under the protection of Francesco degli Ordelaffi. Geoffrey Chaucer, according to the most recent theories of the date of his birth, was a little boy of seven. Edward III of England had won the battle of Crecy in the previous year. Charles of Luxemburg, King of Bohemia, unworthy grandson of Dante's adored Henry, and son of the heroic blind King John who had fallen at Crecy, had been elected Holy Roman Emperor as Charles IV. From Avignon, Pierre Roger de Beaufort misruled the Church of Christ and profaned the throne of the Fisherman, under the title of Pope Clement VI.

The condition of Italy had altered but little since Dante had written his famous lament in the sixth canto of the *Purgatorio*. She was still "hostelry of sorrow," and not yet again "kdy of provinces." "O wonderful poet," writes Catherine's contemporary, Benvenuto da Imola, "would that thou couldst come to life again now! Where is peace, where is liberty, where is tranquillity in Italy? Thou wouldst readily see, O Dante, that in thy time certain particular evils oppressed her; but these, indeed, were small and few; for thou dost enumerate among the woes of Italy the lack of a monarch and the discord of certain families; whereas now worse things oppress us, so that I can say of all Italy what thy Virgil said of one city: *Crudelis ubique luctus, ubique pavor, et flunma mortis imago*.¹ Assuredly, Italy suffered not such things in the time of Hannibal, nor in that of Pyrrhus, nor in that of the Goths or the Lombards. For Attila did not cross the Apennines, nor did Totila cross the Po, but only wasted Apulia and Rome. With how much greater excuse then, if it were lawful, could I cry out to the Almighty, than thou, whose lot was cast in happy times which all we now living in wretched Italy may well envy? Let Him then, who can, now

¹ *Aeneid*, II.
368, 369. 2